

## **A City of Detroit Policy on Food Security**

### **“Creating a Food Secure Detroit”**

#### Preamble

*Community Food Security* can be defined as the condition which exists when all of the members of a community have access, in close proximity, to adequate amounts of nutritious, culturally appropriate food at all times, from sources that are environmentally sound and just. This food security policy was developed to affirm the City of Detroit’s commitment to nurturing the development of a food secure city in which all of its citizens are hunger-free, healthy and benefit from the food systems that impact their lives. This policy also affirms the City of Detroit’s commitment to supporting sustainable food systems that provide people with high quality food, employment, and that also contribute to the long-term well-being of the environment.

This policy addresses the following areas:

- Current access to quality food in Detroit
- Hunger and Malnutrition
- Impacts/Effects of an Inadequate Diet
- Citizen Education
- Economic Injustice in the Food System
- Urban Agriculture
- The Role of Schools and other Public Institutions
- Emergency Response

This document is organized by a statement of the issues, followed by actions needed to address those issues. This policy also calls for the formation of a Detroit Food Policy Council devoted to addressing the issues outlined herein.

### Current Access to Quality Food in Detroit

Access is germane to any discussion about a community's food security. Access is the availability of quality food within a reasonable distance from where people live. Access also includes the ease and ability to travel to where quality food is available, as well as the affordability of that food and its cultural suitability to specific population groups within the community.

In the city of Detroit, the most accessible food-related establishments are party stores, dollar stores, fast-food restaurants and gas stations. Although most neighborhoods may have a grocery store within a "reasonable" distance, the quality and selection of food items is exceedingly lacking. Most city stores have a very limited variety of unprocessed (fresh) vegetables and fruits. Most foods are canned, boxed, frozen and/or highly processed. Highly processed foods are nutrient-poor, with excessive salt, sugar, and harmful fats. These stores also lack food alternatives for persons with the chronic conditions, such as heart disease, hypertension and diabetes, who require low-salt, sugar-free, healthy carbohydrates and healthy fats. These and other chronic health conditions exist and are growing at alarming rates in the African-American community.

The lack of access to transportation, an inadequate public transportation system, and safety issues are all factors impacting a person's ability to choose when and where they shop for food items. Fast-food restaurants, dollar stores, party stores and gas stations are often the closest and most convenient establishments from which people get food.

With regard to affordability, the cheapest food items are usually the most heavily processed and unhealthy items. Fresh food items are more expensive, even though they are often of poor quality. The availability and affordability of local and/or organic vegetables, fruits and meats is practically non-existent in Detroit, while merely crossing jurisdictional borders gives one that access. In fact, many Detroiters with transportation and economic means regularly, if not exclusively, shop for food beyond the borders of this city.

#### *Actions Needed:*

- *Increase the number of culturally appropriate food outlets within a reasonable distance in all Detroit neighborhoods.*
- *Perform research on the type and location of food establishments and the extent to which these stores fulfill neighborhoods needs.*
- *Create mechanisms with store operators and the Michigan Dept of Agriculture food safety inspection system to ensure that Detroit stores comply with food safety codes and maintain clean and sanitary food preparation and sales environments within stores.*
- *Ensure that food stores carry a variety of fresh foods and food items for persons with special needs and chronic conditions.*
- *Put in place monitoring mechanisms to ensure that food items are safe and fresh.*
- *Review bus stops and put in place bus lines that give people direct access to grocery stores without the need of a transfer. Assess the need for "grocery routes" which reflect actual shopping needs (evenings and weekends).*

- *Make locally grown and organic foods accessible throughout the city by supporting increased production within neighborhoods, neighborhood farmers markets, and small business assistance to neighborhood stores that agree to participate in a “good neighbor program” in which they agree to sell more locally grown fresh and healthy foods, do not sell alcohol and tobacco to minors, and negotiate other mutual benefits with neighborhood organizations that can appropriately represent neighborhood desires.*
- *Oppose distribution of genetically modified foods (GMO)’s in the City of Detroit.*

### Hunger and Malnutrition

The ability to sustain one’s life through eating adequate and healthy foods is the most basic of all human rights. The City of Detroit should be committed to abolishing hunger, food insecurity, and malnutrition. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, an estimated 400,000 households in Michigan live with hunger or the threat of hunger. With thousands of vulnerable persons and families within the city finding that their resources are not enough to cover rent, utilities, medicine, clothes and other basic necessities, one could guess that a substantial number of the hungry live in Detroit.

The Director of the WIC program in Detroit writes that the program services approximately 65,000 residents per year; seventy-five percent are infants and children up to five years old. Year 2000 census data indicated that 12% of children had low birth weight, 20-26% of the children were anemic, and 10% were overweight. A recent pediatrician’s report documented that “even mild to moderate under-nutrition in young children is linked to problems that last throughout the lifespan.”

While Federal programs, such as food stamps and WIC have helped to alleviate the most severe forms of hunger, they haven’t adequately impacted food security. As well, the elderly population suffers from hunger and malnutrition due to isolation, lack of access to stores, inability to prepare nutritious meals, illness, general poor health and cognitive challenges.

#### *Actions Needed:*

- *Institute and support community self-help projects that address both hunger and malnutrition.*
- *Support and increase community food banks, as well as information about and access to them.*
- *Identify government and other resources that support programs to alleviate hunger and malnutrition, especially to the most vulnerable of the population.*
- *Advocate for increased availability of state issued food benefits to eligible recipients and educate community residents about the role and importance of food stamps as the society’s commitment to meeting basic needs of fellow citizens who are ill-served by the marketplace.*
- *Encourage and work with faith-based institutions to do extensive out-reach and ensure that the food needs of young families and the elderly are met.*
- *Educate the community and families about the benefits of breastfeeding and the risks associated with infant formulas.*

### Impacts/Effects of an Inadequate Diet

Recent research suggests that many of Detroit's children are consuming "foods" which do not promote optimal health. The study indicated that many children are getting energy primarily from powdered fruit flavored drinks. Children who do not have an adequate diet perform poorly in school because they are absent more due to illness, have shorter attention spans, retain less, and often exhibit inappropriate behaviors.

Far too many children and adults are overweight or obese and as a result suffer from poor self-esteem, lack of energy, social challenges and various health problems. Obesity should be of major concern in the city of Detroit. Clearly, at the heart of efforts to address obesity must be the understanding that this is a cultural phenomenon that is deep rooted in the habits that have been developed by post World War II generations of the American populace and federal policies that greatly subsidize less healthy processed foods making them abundant and cheap over fresh produce.

The movement towards convenience slowly led families away from the preparation of fresh foods that sustained health and wellness, to pre-packaged, instant foods that reduced the time spent in kitchens, but compromised nutrition. That downward spiral has continued with the proliferation of "fast food" restaurants throughout the city of Detroit. Many families get significant percentages of their food from such establishments. Research has shown that the fat contained in burgers and fries contribute significantly to obesity in children and adults. The tendency of those establishments to "supersize" their product has led to over-consumption, and again contributes to obesity and poor health.

Many Detroiters suffer from illnesses that could be prevented or controlled by improved eating habits including hypertension, diabetes, and heart disease. It has been suggested that certain cancers may be caused by nitrates and nitrites in processing meats that are used frequently in the African-American community such as smoked meats, bacon, sausage and lunch meat. African American communities also face higher risk from diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and other diet-related illnesses.

The elderly, whose health is often more fragile than young and middle-aged people, are even more adversely impacted by poor diet and nutrition. Poor diet accelerates the aging process, contributing to degeneration of internal organs and mental capacity.

Culture is dynamic, and it can't be created or altered by individuals. Creating culture is a collective venture. Impacting the lifestyle habits that contribute to obesity and poor health will require the commitment of the City of Detroit and a broad cross-section of the institutions, families and individual members of our communities.

#### *Actions Needed:*

- *Conduct research specific to the population of the city of Detroit to quantify rates of malnourished, overweight and obese children and adults, as well as rates of diet-related*

*diseases and dental problems of youth. Set in place mechanisms to track or monitor the rates over time.*

- *Educate the public and policy-makers on this issue to bring attention to the scope of the issue and the immediacy needed in seeking solutions.*
- *Research and address cultural barriers to improving eating habits.*
- *Provide and promote opportunities for shared meal preparations at Community Kitchens, and growing more fresh fruits and vegetables in backyards and within neighborhoods.*

### Citizen Education/Food Literacy

Providing affordable, healthy food choices and easy access to those stores and markets which offer those choices is but one step towards impacting the health of our community through the foods we eat. How to select healthy choices, understand food labels and ingredients, and culturally appealing healthy methods of food preparation are essential as well. It is also important that our community understands the connection between what they eat and dealing with the health issues faced by so many. There exist a need for youth and adults to be able to unpack and counter the marketing messages of the mainstream food system that creates a disproportionate “toxic food environment” with billboards and other forms of marketing in poor communities and communities of color.

#### *Actions needed:*

- *Provide on-going education through the City of Detroit Health and Wellness Promotion Department, schools, churches and appropriate agencies on healthy food choices and culturally appropriate food preparation.*
- *Oppose especially marketing of sugar-, fat- and salt-laden food and beverages to kids and in schools and other youth-oriented environments.*
- *Provide education on food choices and preparation as related to specific conditions and diseases prevalent in our community such as high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, asthma, allergies and cancer.*
- *Encourage grocery stores, Eastern Market and food markets to offer healthy recipes and healthy food preparation demonstrations, and sponsor educational sessions and food preparation classes.*
- *Educate community, parents, and youth about and oppose contracts with soda manufacturers in schools.*

### Economic Injustice within the Food Systems

There exist two grocery stores owned and or operated by African Americans in Detroit. It is unknown whether any food wholesalers, farmers, distributors or food processing facilities providing food for the city of Detroit are owned, operated, or even hire Detroiters, specifically African-Americans; or if any of the food products consumed in our community were developed by people from our community. Aside from cashiers, baggers, stock persons and a few butchers, Detroiters, specifically African-Americans are absent from the food system. Our primary and predominant role is that of consumer.

Detroit's majority population must be represented at all levels and in all aspects of the food system. Having an economic/agricultural safety net to support the most vulnerable in our community should be included in our goals. Redefining wealth and prosperity within our social relationships and spiritual values will be a major step towards ensuring economic justice.

*Actions Needed:*

- *Identify and eliminate barriers to African-American participation and ownership in all aspects of the food system.*
- *Explore providing employment and re-distribution of wealth through cooperative community ownership.*
- *Convene dialogues and create partnerships with local universities and national organizations advocating for African-American communities to develop entrepreneurship and low-cost loan programs which encourage African American entrepreneurship.*
- *Hold those accountable within the food system that profit from Detroiters to integrate Detroiters into their operations at all levels.*
- *Develop frameworks for providing business incentives (such as tax incentives, small business loans, etc.) so that businesses that receive public subsidies return maximal benefits to the surrounding community in terms of healthy food access, local employment and other forms of community responsiveness. Such frameworks should be developed in collaboration with community organizations and residents. Incentives should support stores development and improvement in currently underserved neighborhoods.*

### Urban Agriculture

Detroit has a history of gardening and farming lots that goes back decades. African-Americans, who left southern states to provide for their families through factory jobs in the Detroit area, brought with them their connection to the land and their knowledge of how to grow vegetables and flowers. They knew how to preserve food, as well. Mayor Coleman A. Young started the Farm-A-Lot program in the 1970s which allowed residents to obtain a permit to farm vacant lots in their neighborhoods. The program provided seeds, seedlings and tilling of the land. Today, there is an urban agriculture movement in Detroit that is recognized throughout the U.S., Canada and Europe. Three farms currently exist within the city, as well as over 100 community and school gardens as well as hundreds of family gardens. There are also extensive training programs and support for urban agriculture ranging from bio-intensive growing methods to building a solar passive greenhouse.

Detroiters recognize that the value of the vacant land in the city goes beyond the construction of a structure. Residents have turned "abandoned" lots into productive agricultural resources. Mini farmers markets are springing up citywide providing Detroiters with fresh, organic food grown right in the neighborhood. Urban agriculture should be recognized as an essential contributor to the local food system. It ensures a ready supply of nutritious, high quality vegetables and fruits. The entry costs associated with intensive food production on small urban farms in a cooperative environment is much lower and accessible than the current trend of mega farms. Urban growers stand to benefit from increased opportunities to market local products. The potential market for

local value-added products makes urban agriculture even more attractive as a local economic development tool.

*Actions Needed:*

- *Community, school and home gardens and mini-farms should be protected and supported through local, state and federal legislation.*
- *The City of Detroit should support the efforts of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network and others to identify and turn into production, multiple acres of City land on a long term lease with an option to purchase.*
- *Update city codes and laws to allow urban agriculture, food production, and farmers markets on a neighborhood scale.*
- *The City should acknowledge the importance of community gardens and protect them as resources that will not be taken over for other types of development.*
- *The City of Detroit should provide resources and equipment for communities, schools and urban farms such as tractors, tools, seeds, topsoil, compost, fencing and access to water.*
- *Identify and model other State programs that support small urban farms and help absorb the costs associated with food production, marketing and organic certification.*
- *USDA initiatives to support the marketing and distribution of locally grown products to schools and creation of school gardens should be explored and encouraged.*
- *Wherever possible, produce from local school gardens should be used in the preparation of school meals.*
- *Encourage large public institutions such as Wayne State University, local hospitals, and large employers to source their cafeterias from local growers.*

### The Role of Schools and other Public Institutions

Schools and other institutions such as churches, community associations, social service agencies, nursing homes, homeless shelters and missions, hospitals, home daycare centers, and before and after school programs can have major impact on the dietary habits and health of the community. That impact can be made by purposefully educating the community as well as intentionally making healthy food options a priority. These institutions are possibly the most direct ways to reach the greatest number of people. As well, the growing nationwide interest in locally grown organic foods and value-added food products should be considered as an economic opportunity as it becomes necessary and is fitting that Detroiters seek independent employment. Our community should also become the suppliers of healthy food choices to the institutions within our community.

Many school related groups have traditionally relied on candy sales to raise funds for parent groups, clubs and athletic teams. Other fundraising options should be explored that do not promote excessive consumption of processed sugars.

Students attending Detroit schools should have the opportunity to plant, tend and harvest foods in school gardens. Students working in school gardens eat more fresh fruits and vegetables than those who do not. Many schools across the nation are realizing that farm-fresh produce is superior to canned and frozen foods. They are also realizing that supporting local or regional

farmers helps to sustain local and regional food systems. When children have a greater understanding of where foods come from, they generally develop a greater appreciation for those foods, and are more willing to try food choices that may not be considered popular. Schools and other public institutions have the responsibility of educating the citizens of the City of Detroit about health and wellness. Newsletters, meetings, and other gatherings should regularly feature information about diet, exercise and other components of health and wellness.

Block clubs, community associations and churches should be encouraged to partner with the City of Detroit to develop a network of community gardens. These gardens will increase the amount of fresh, affordable, nutritious food available to Detroiters, will promote community building and intergeneration communication and will help to improve the city's aesthetics and air quality. Additionally, publicly owned land should be made available whenever possible to develop community gardens.

*Actions Needed:*

- *Schools and other public institutions should encourage young people to pursue careers in agriculture, aquaculture, animal husbandry, bee-keeping and other food related fields, so as to reduce the dependency of Detroiters on others for food.*
- *Schools and other public institutions should eliminate soda pop, candy, gum, and "foods" with high sugar content, artificial preservatives, and artificial dyes from vending machines. They should be replaced with high-quality snacks and beverages that promote health and wellness such as fruit, nuts, granola bars, wholegrain chips, 100% juices and water.*
- *Schools should be encouraged to develop food curriculum for pre-K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade and beyond. Curriculum could include aspects of production, processing, healthy eating, and recycling and composting.*
- *Every school should have a school garden that can provide food for their lunches.*
- *Schools should require school lunch programs to incorporate fresh local and regional foods and develop relationships with those farmers who can provide educational opportunities for children.*
- *Encourage the formation of health ministries in churches that includes a focus on developing healthy dietary habits.*
- *Encourage churches to offer healthy choices at church functions, and incorporate church-sponsored gardens and healthy food preparation information as part of any food banks or programs.*

### Emergency Response

A food related emergency may involve the unintentional or deliberate contamination, or sudden loss of access to food. A food emergency could occur at any point in the food system from farm to table and may be the result of natural disasters, human error or intentional threat. Any food emergency must be quickly identified followed by a well-coordinated and communicated response. That response should include pre-established lines of communication, alternate food and water supplies and delivery systems, as well as close coordination with local, State and Federal emergency responders.



*Actions Needed:*

- *A food emergency plan, that includes strategies for prevention of food emergencies, for the City of Detroit that is communicated and made available to the public.*
- *Coordination among church and community organizations, elected officials and other community leaders, law enforcement, schools, churches and other institutions, hospitals and other medical facilities for dissemination of information and training as first responders in case of a serious event or situation.*
- *Development of adequate food reserves in case of an emergency.*